

REGARDING THE NOTIFICATION FROM THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH
CONCERNING THE BOOK *JESUS, SYMBOL OF GOD*, BY FR. ROGER HAIGHT, S.J.

Committee on Doctrine
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

In the light of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's recent notification concerning the book *Jesus, Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999) the bishops' Committee on Doctrine offers the following brief statement in order to clarify any misconceptions, to affirm our support for the decision of the Holy See and to reassert the importance of authentic theological enquiry.

First, the notification does not comment on the author's personal character but assesses the book, judging it to contain "serious doctrinal errors regarding certain fundamental truths of faith." The errors concern "the pre-existence of the Word, the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, the salvific value of the death of Jesus, the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus and of the church, and the resurrection of Jesus." Because the author continues to hold views that are erroneous and "until such time as his positions are corrected to be in complete conformity with the doctrine of the church," the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith judged that he "may not teach Catholic theology." Such a decision is a judgment solely on the author's suitability to teach Catholic theology, given his own present mistaken theological positions.

Second, this negative judgment concluded an involved process, including consultation with the author over the course of five years. At the end of this lengthy process the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith rightfully concluded that Father Haight's book contained serious doctrinal errors that were contrary to Scripture and the ecumenical councils of the church, particularly the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325).

Third, the bishops' Committee on Doctrine for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops welcomes the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's notification. It is essential that we, as the authentic teachers and guardians of the apostolic faith, ensure that the faithful throughout our country be confirmed in their faith, and not become confused by ambiguous or erroneous theological speculation. Authentic doctrine, contained in the Scriptures and in the apostolic tradition and defined by the councils of the church, must be the explicit and unambiguous foundation not only for catechetical instruction, but also for theological teaching and inquiry.

Fourth, in accordance with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, "bishops should encourage the creative work of theologians," for they indeed "serve the church through research done in a way that respects theological method." At the same time, however, "it is intrinsic to the principles and methods of their research and teaching in their academic discipline that theologians respect the authority of the bishops and assent to Catholic doctrine according to the degree of authority with which it is taught" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 29-30). While the Catholic theological community is not only competent but indeed obliged to address creatively and to debate strenuously theological issues that are open to authentic development, theologians are not permitted to espouse theological positions that are contrary to the teaching of Scripture and the ecumenical councils of the church. The competence to judge authoritatively what is and is not in conformity with the faith of the Catholic Church resides within the charism of the bishops in union with the pope. Thus, the notification assists the bishops in teaching that the divinity of Jesus, the reality of the Trinity, the salvific value of Jesus' death and bodily resurrection, and the universality of his salvific mediation are to be accepted in faith by all members of the Catholic Church, for such doctrines are at the very heart of the Christian Gospel - the good news of salvation.